

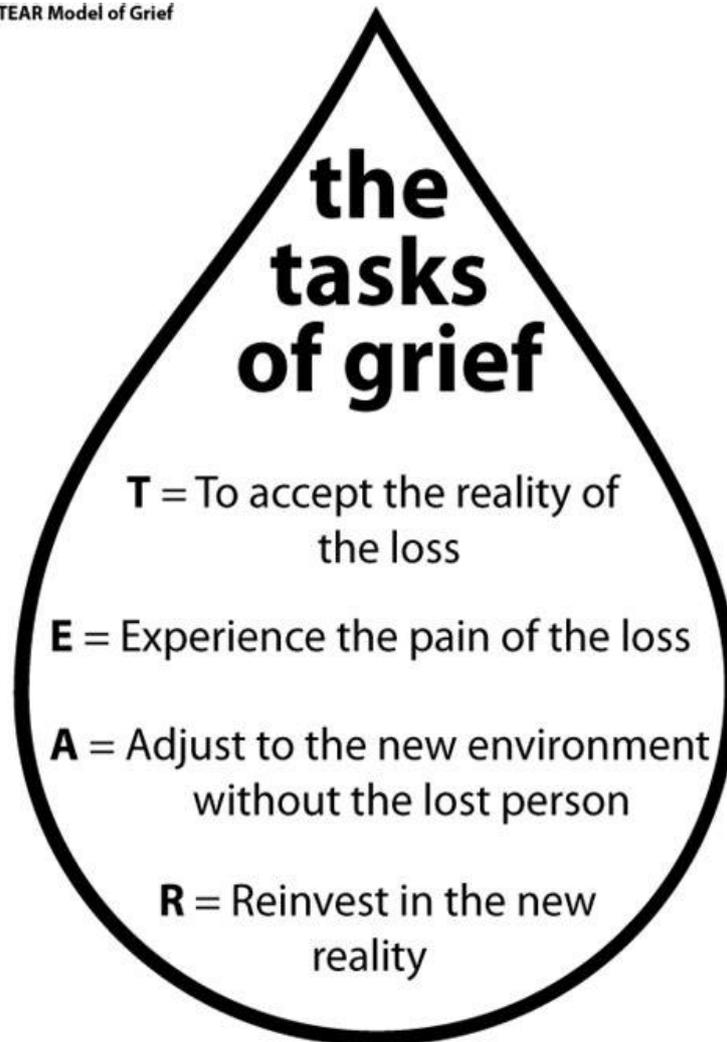
Models of Grief

The following pages contain the most common theories of how grief is processed.

It is important to remember that these are *theories* and everyone experiences grief in their own way.

Worden's Four Tasks of Grieving (1991)

TEAR Model of Grief



This is not a timeline or a 4 step process. These will not necessarily happen in this order and you can move back and forth through them. You cannot force someone to move through the stages and everyone will go through them differently.

To accept the reality of the loss– Attending the funeral or memorial and talking about the person in the past tense. Sometimes, accepting how the person died is not as easy with people not wanting to talk about it, suicide for example

Experience the pain of the loss – Acknowledging, talking about and understanding all the complex emotions in order to work through them

Adjust to the new environment without the person – This can mean different things depending on your relationship with the person that died and their place in your life, if a child loses their primary care giver, the adjustment is not just them not being there but all the daily changes that have taken place

Reinvest– This is the enduring connection with the person that has died while moving on in life without them

7 Stages of Grief

(Modified Kubler-Ross Model)

Shock*	• Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news.
Denial	• Trying to avoid the inevitable.
Anger	• Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
Bargaining	• Seeking in vain for a way out.
Depression	• Final realization of the inevitable.
Testing*	• Seeking realistic solutions.
Acceptance	• Finally finding the way forward.

*This model is extended slightly from the original Kubler-Ross model, which does not explicitly include the Shock and Testing stages. These stages however are often useful to understand and to facilitate change.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, adapted her 5 stages of grief to 7 to include how we feel after someone has died by adding Shock and Testing into it.

Kubler-Ross believed that this was a sequence of feelings and that to finally accept the death of someone you had to move through all of the stages.

She believed that at times people would get stuck in a stage whether it was continually denying that the person had died, or a long period of depression.

Today we acknowledge that these stages aren't sequential and that they are common feelings that we all have when we experience the death of someone close to us.

- [Shock stage*](#): Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news.
- [Denial stage](#): Trying to avoid the inevitable.
- [Anger stage](#): Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
- [Bargaining stage](#): Seeking in vain for a way out., we're looking a way to cope with our pain
- [Depression stage](#): Final realization of the inevitable.
- [Testing stage*](#): Seeking realistic solutions.
- [Acceptance stage](#): Finally finding the way forward.

A common problem with the above cycle is that people may get stuck in one phase. Thus a person may become stuck in denial, never moving on from the position of not accepting the inevitable future. When it happens, they still keep on denying it, such as the person who has lost their job still going into the city only to sit on a park bench all day.

Getting stuck in denial is common in some cultures where expressing anger is not acceptable. The person may feel that anger, but may then repress it, bottling it up inside.

Likewise, a person may be stuck in permanent anger (which is itself a form of flight from reality) or repeated bargaining. It is more difficult to get stuck in active states than in passivity, and getting stuck in depression is perhaps more common.

Going in cycles

Another trap is that when a person moves on to the next phase, they have not completed an earlier phase and so move backwards in cyclic loops that repeat previous emotion and actions. Thus, for example, a person that finds bargaining not to be working, may go back into anger or denial.

Cycling is itself a form of avoidance of the inevitable, and going backwards in time may seem to be a way of extending the time before the perceived bad thing happens.

The Dual Process Model

An outline of Stroebe and Schut's dual process theory



In the mid-90s, Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut came up with a model of grief called the dual process model. This bereavement theory suggests that grief operates in two main ways and people switch back and forth between them as they grieve.

You may have heard people talk about how grief has to be 'worked through' or 'faced head on'. Stroebe and Schut do not believe that this is true. They suggest that sometimes ignoring your emotions, or distracting yourself from your grief, is a natural way of coping with grief.

This theory of grief describes two different ways of behaving: loss-oriented and restoration-oriented. As you grieve, you will switch, or 'oscillate', between these two different modes of being. This is why it is called the dual process model, because two different processes are happening.

Loss-oriented

Things that make you think about your loved one and their death are called loss-oriented stressors. In essence, these are thoughts, feelings, actions and events that make you focus on your grief and pain.

This may involve things like thinking about how much you miss your loved one, looking at old photos, or recalling a particular memory. Loss-oriented stressors can bring up lots of powerful emotions, such as sadness, loneliness and anger.

Restoration-oriented

Restoration-oriented stressors are things that let you get on with daily life and distract you from your grief for a while. Even for a few minutes, these thoughts and activities will allow you a small break from focusing on your pain.

A common restoration-oriented stressor is working or cleaning the house. Some people cope with grief by taking on a tough work assignment or by tending to everyday chores in order to give themselves something other than their pain to focus on. Other examples include watching a funny TV show, going out with friends, or doing exercise.

You may think that repressing or ignoring emotions is unhealthy. In some cases this true, but Stroebe and Schut believe that for most people it is actually a normal way of coping with grief. It is our mind's way of easing the pain a little and giving us at least a few moments where we can get important practical tasks done.

Stroebe and Schut argue that without restoration-oriented behaviour, you could end up completely unable to look after yourself or get on with daily life. In this way, it is a vital part of carrying on after the death of a loved one. It is called restoration-oriented because it is behaviour that is trying to restore order and normality.

Oscillation

Oscillation refers to the way that a grieving person can move back and forth between the two modes of being; loss-oriented and restoration-oriented. Stroebe and Schut say that the bereaved should embrace this oscillation, as you can move in and out of intense grief and tackle the reality of the loss bit by bit.

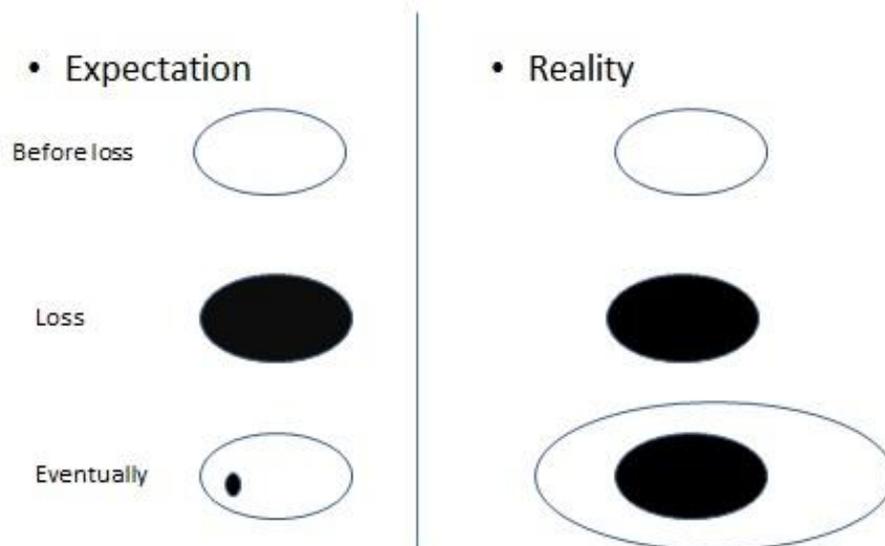
You may have been oscillating between the two modes without realising it. Perhaps in the morning you watched television and for a while you were distracted by an interesting news story – that's restoration-oriented. Then you saw an advert that made you think of a particular memory of your loved one, which made you cry – that's loss-oriented. After crying for a while, you thought, "Right, I really need to clean the kitchen." And while focusing on cleaning, for even the briefest of moments, you feel less focused on your pain – you've moved back to restoration.

Some people find the dual process model a helpful way of thinking about their grief because it does not put emphasis on confronting your feelings. If you struggle to express your emotions, or find that distraction helps you cope, you might find the dual process model more accurately reflects your experience.

Stroebe and Schut also argued that the dual process model is useful for men, whereas previous theories of grief focused on a very stereotypically female way of grieving; namely, expressing emotions directly and working through them. Men, they noted, are often more likely to use restoration-oriented activities to help them cope, and this model of grief acknowledges that as a healthy, normal way of grieving.

Tonkin's Model of Grief

from Lois Tonkin, Grief Counsellor, Wellington, New Zealand



Tonkin's model of grief challenges the idea that 'time heals all wounds' or that grief disappears with time. It suggests that we do not move on from grief, but grow around it.

Tonkin's theory suggests that over time, your grief will stay much the same, but your life will begin to grow around it. You will have new experiences, meet new people, and begin to find moments of enjoyment. Slowly, these moments may grow more frequent and the outer circle will grow a little bigger.

Eventually, there will be a much larger circle, with the same size shaded area – but the grief is not as dominant overall. This is why Tonkin's model of grief is called growing around grief.

This does not mean the grief disappears. It will probably always be there, and may even grow a little bigger at difficult times. But it no longer completely dominates the circle.

The idea of growing around grief acknowledges that grief doesn't always disappear with time. It also shows that despite grief not going away, this doesn't mean you will always feel as bad as you do right now, because your life will grow around the grief.

For many bereaved people, the idea of moving on or forgetting is one of the most problematic parts of grieving. Tonkin's model suggests that it is okay for grief to always be part of your life.

However, you should bear in mind that this is only a theory of how grief works. There are many other models of grief which may more accurately represent how you experience grief. Everyone is unique in how they react to the death of a loved one and none of these models represent the 'right' way to grieve.